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**NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY**  
**JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE**  
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ENCOURAGING *JIHAD* ABANDONMENT**

**by**

**Christopher Hayter**

*Commander, United States Navy*

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**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.**

**This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes.**


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## **Abstract**

State responses to trans-national terrorism have long included law enforcement, the military, and intelligence services. Only recently have soft power elements been brought to bear to encourage *jihad* abandonment. Several nations implement a variety of de-radicalization or disengagement programs aimed at preventing future attacks, either by convincing a radical to abandon his or her radical ideology (de-radicalize) or merely to abstain from future attacks (disengage). Though individual program results vary, and measuring success for an ideological concept such as de-radicalization is problematic, graduates of these programs have low recidivism rates. This thesis analyzes established de-radicalization/disengagement programs, identifies elements that make them successful, and provides recommendations for a framework for a United States-sponsored de-radicalization/disengagement program, domestically and with partner nations overseas.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The November 13, 2015 terrorist attacks on Paris shocked the West nearly as much as the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in 2001. They stand as a stark reminder that the so-called “Global War on Terror” still rages in the capital cities of NATO countries and is not just a back-page news, forgotten conflict fought on the other side of the globe. As policymakers reexamine ‘hard power’ options available and appropriate in the pursuit of national objectives to counter terrorism, the true front lines of this conflict remain in the realm of ideas. How can state policymakers counter an extremist ideology which motivates its radical adherents to commit violent terrorist attacks, or otherwise convince those followers to disengage?

Several nations devised creative programs claiming to “de-radicalize” (to experience a change in belief) program participants, often prisoners or others considering *jihad* as a foreign fighter. But can a state really convince an adherent of radical Islamic ideology to de-radicalize? Perhaps merely convincing the radical to “disengage” (or to merely change behavior) from terrorist acts is enough. Or would disengagement without de-radicalization prove anathema to lasting peace? In any case, is this kind of ideological conversion (in the case of de-radicalization) or psychological influence (for disengagement) even possible in the hands of a Western, secular state? Or are such policies the exclusive realm of Muslim-majority regimes? How can policymakers strike a balance between individual freedom and collective security for its citizens, with regard to incarcerated radicals? These and other quandaries pockmark the landscape of state-

sanctioned efforts at exercising the informational arm of state power towards the goal of defeating radical ideology.

Though it is just in the past decade and a half that al Qaeda conducted attacks against Western capitals, political violence is not new. In response, governments have marshalled resources from across the elements of national power. Nations have flexed hard power, such as the military and law enforcement, and enacted soft power initiatives such as creative prisoner rehabilitation programs. In some cases, they even struck diplomatic agreements aimed at achieving lasting peace with terrorist organizations. This thesis examines the landscape of research focused on de-radicalization and disengagement programs (DPPs) to lay the groundwork for analysis and comparison, and inform policy recommendations.

This thesis compares state-sponsored efforts to sway violent radicals to either disengage from using violence in the pursuit of their cause, or to de-radicalize from their violent ideology. Political violence occurs in complex environments, and data about de-radicalization and disengagement attempts is sufficiently sparse, that direct “apples-to-apples” comparisons between case studies are often problematic. Nonetheless, useful analysis and comparison among the existent body of research is still possible, and this thesis demonstrates where effective policy recommendations can be distilled from “successful” de-radicalization and disengagement programs. Existing programs show that radical terrorists may choose to disengage when faced with a changing physical or psychological environment, both of which can be influenced by state “soft power” resources. De-radicalization, on the other hand, is the exclusive realm of an ideological shift. For de-radicalization programs to succeed, they must stem from a successful,

legitimate ideological argument, presented by competent authority, and be accompanied by practical alternatives and some sort of enforcement mechanism, such as the application of social/family pressure to discourage recidivism.

The United States should focus its efforts on crafting an effective de-radicalization strategy, rather than merely encouraging radicals to disengage. It should include ideological counseling, to the degree supported by Muslim partner nations or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and must include reinforcing a radical's family network, practical alternatives to radicalism, long term contact and monitoring, and the restraining effect of family or other social networks.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review and Research Methodology

John Horgan and Tore Bjørgo, two of the foremost scholars of de-radicalization and disengagement, provide ample background to the field. Horgan describes the basics of disengagement programs and the types of disengagement: psychological and physical. He draws distinctions between de-radicalization and disengagement, noting that “disengagement does not necessarily imply de-radicalization” and that de-radicalization may not be a requirement for disengagement.<sup>1</sup>

Horgan also notes the difficulty of determining whether or not a terrorist has de-radicalized or merely disengaged.<sup>2</sup> He cites several disengagement programs and the techniques used in modifying behavior of organized criminals as well as ideologically based terrorists.

Arie Kruganski, et al., present a well-reasoned theory for explaining the radicalization process. Their radicalization theory centers on the idea that an individual who has been radicalized is normally seeking a quest for significance which, they reason, can be fulfilled through using violence to obtain the goals of a terrorist group.<sup>3</sup> The authors describe that once this “significance quest” begins, the radicalization process continues with the identification of an ideology which justifies the use of violence to

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1. John Horgan, “Individual Disengagement: A Psychological Analysis,” in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. by Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (New York: Routledge, 2009), 28.

2. John Horgan, “De-radicalization or disengagement? A Process in Need of Clarity and a Counterterrorism Initiative in Need of Evaluation,” *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 4 (2008), <http://terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/32/html> (accessed October 08, 2015).

3. Arie Kruglanski, et al., “The Psychology of Radicalization and De-radicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism,” *Advances in Political Psychology* 35, no. 1 (2014): 73.

obtain the group's stated goals, thereby gaining significance. The last part of the radicalization process is the reduction of inhibitions to the use of violence to obtain the group goals. This is accomplished by an internal re-prioritization of terrorist goals versus other non-terrorist life goals incompatible with the use of violence.<sup>4</sup> Competing goals are marginalized and the violent terrorist goals gain primacy. The degree to which the terrorist goals overshadow any non-violent goals in an individual's decision-making reflects his or her degree of radicalization.

Kruglanski, et al. present several different constructs for de-radicalization, each of which reverses one element of the process whereby the individual became radicalized. The motivation of "significance gain" may be removed as a motivating factor if the terrorist group's activities lose their appeal in the mind of the radicalized individual, or if the individual becomes otherwise jaded by the group. The justification for violence can be removed if the radical ideology is refuted by an authority figure (i.e., a Muslim cleric using the Qu'ran). In this case, the radical may still adhere to the group's stated goals, but may disavow the use of violence in the pursuit of those goals. Finally, other competing life goals may re-emerge and outweigh the terrorist goals which required the use of violence, such as if a radical decides to pursue family life and sees that as incompatible with terrorism.<sup>5</sup> By characterizing de-radicalization in this way, the authors provide a useful framework upon which de-radicalization strategies may be developed. The cases analyzed in this thesis incorporate many of the elements of successful de-radicalization programs discussed above.

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4. Ibid., 80.

5. Ibid., 86.

Horgan and Kurt Braddock analyzed five de-radicalization programs, some of which have been touted as highly successful. They identified the difficulties in comparing programs when there is no standardized benchmark for success. Indeed, the authors noted “although the number of suspected militants released is verifiable, the number that returned to fight is not. And where precisely they returned to fight has proven a further complicating factor.”<sup>6</sup> They propose a method which relies on evidence, data, and calculations to compare the effectiveness of de-radicalization programs, rather than mere subjective claims.

Christopher Boucek outlines the key elements of the Saudi Arabian prison-based, state-run de-radicalization program in his essay “Extremist Reeducation and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia.” (2009). The central idea of this de-radicalization program is religious reeducation, whereby Muslim clerics and scholars show program participants the error of their extreme beliefs and explain to them the state-approved moderate interpretation of Islam.<sup>7</sup> One of the essential underpinnings of the Saudi program is the legitimacy of those re-educating the prisoners. For de-radicalization to occur, the individual must make a decision based on a well-crafted argument, sound enough to challenge an ideology previously held strongly enough to justify terrorism. The kind of ideological challenge which must take place can only be presented by one who is perceived as a credible, competent authority.

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6. John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, “Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of De-radicalization Programs,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no. 2 (2010): 275.

7. Christopher Boucek, “Extremist Reeducation and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia,” *Terrorism Monitor* 5, no. 16 (2007), [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=4321&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=182&no\\_cache=1#.Vh\\_HHjboVIU](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/tm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=4321&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=182&no_cache=1#.Vh_HHjboVIU) (accessed October 12, 2015).



Daniel Koehler researched and wrote about several German de-radicalization programs. His work provides insight into the underpinning theories, inner-workings, and effectiveness of the EXIT-Germany program, designed to provide an off-ramp for right-wing extremists, and the HAYAT<sup>8</sup> program, a similarly structured program adapted to counter violent religious extremism. Each of these programs leverages family counseling from both governmental and non-governmental agencies to foster de-radicalization.

Koehler highlights the risks to de-radicalization programs in general, posed by “securitization... utilizing them as tools for a classical repressive mode of operations (e.g., for intelligence gathering, identification of dangerous individuals, and surveillance).”<sup>9</sup> For this reason, he maintains that government agencies may not be the best entities to administer these programs, hence the role of NGOs in the successful German programs.<sup>10</sup>

Koehler also notes the problematic aspects of programs which address de-radicalization instead of just disengagement. First, there is a difficulty in assessing the efficacy of such programs. One can measure disengagement by measuring the recidivism rates, i.e., the lack of criminal behavior. It is more challenging to measure when one has changed a belief.<sup>11</sup>

Diaa Rashwan explores two cases of collective disengagement in Egypt. Rashwan chronicled the landmark cases where two prominent violent Islamic extremist groups, *Gama’a al-Islamiya* and the *Egyptian Islamic Jihad*, collectively de-radicalized.

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8. Hayat is the Arabic and Turkish word for “life.” Hayat Germany, <http://hayat-deutschland.de/english/> (accessed January 6, 2015).

9. Daniel Koehler, “De-Radicalization and Disengagement Programs as Counter-Terrorism and Prevention Tools. Insights from Field Experiences regarding German Right-Wing Extremism and Jihadism,” in *Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism among Youth to Prevent Terrorism*, ed. Marco Lombardi et al. (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2015), 121.

10. Ibid., 126.

11. Ibid., 128.

Both of these groups denounced violence and rebranded themselves as non-violent organizations.<sup>12</sup> Gama'a al-Islamiya published an official renunciation of violence and other practical measures, but followed this up with revised theoretical and academic underpinnings for its worldview and ideology.<sup>13</sup> These two actions on the part of the extremist group helped state security officials recognize the sincerity of its de-radicalization claim and contributed to a large scale prisoner release.

In sum, existing research is instructive in comparing several de-radicalization and disengagement programs (DDPs) concerning a variety of religious and nationalist/separatist extremist groups. Policymakers should base new DDPs on successful existing programs, to the degree consistent with the character of the state. They must also strive to implement a holistic approach, avoid focusing too singularly on security matters, but also invoke the social and religious leverage which may be required in de-radicalization or disengagement. This thesis adds to the body of knowledge by comparing several DDPs from a cross section of both Western and Middle Eastern nations, evaluating them for elements of applicability to develop a framework for a United States-sponsored program.

## **Research Methodology**

Perhaps the most influential variable in the realm of de-radicalization and disengagement research concerns the motivations of the terrorist group. Despite a lack of consensus regarding the definition of terrorism, most would agree that terrorists pursue

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12. Diaa Rashwan, "The Renunciation of Violence by Egyptian Jihadi Organizations," in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (New York: Routledge, 2009), 124. Rashwan notes that the situation that precipitated the Gama'a al-Islamiya redefining itself as a non-violent group was severe repression from the Egyptian security services. Accordingly, formulating state de-radicalization policy from this case has its limits.

13. Ibid., 125.

some sort of change in the political environment. Whether that sought after political end state is nationalist or religious in character sets apart state responses accordingly. This critical question affects myriad factors concerning possible de-radicalization or disengagement options, limitations, and imperatives. For example, a terrorist organization seeking national self-determination may be satisfied with a local political settlement granting more autonomy or some other sort of compromise. A radical Islamic terrorist bent on conducting *jihad* to rid the world of infidels, on the other hand, is not as likely to accept a negotiated settlement, because the radical Islamic ideology leaves no room for negotiation with infidels. Radical Islamists believe infidels should be converted, killed, or submit to Islamic rule under *sharia* law, and pay the tax required of a non-Muslim.<sup>14</sup> This thesis researches existing DDPs, identifies the programmatic elements which contribute to their success, and determines if those elements could be projected into a U.S. sponsored DDP overseas in a partner nation or at home.

### **Defining Success**

Much is written about the difficulties of evaluating the effectiveness of DDPs. Though there is no official definition of de-radicalization, the concept generally has to do with a previously radicalized individual experiencing a change in perceived appropriate boundaries of action in pursuit of their own or their group's goals. Koehler notes that,

'de-radicalization' as a concept denotes a process of individual or collective cognitive change from criminal, radical or extremist identities to a non-criminal or moderate psychological state. 'De-radicalization' has to be strongly differentiated from 'disengagement', which denotes the mere behavioural role change (from offending to non-offending) while leaving the ideological or psychological aspect aside. Thus, individuals can be

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14. Aryn Baker, "Unholy Choices: Christians in the Middle East Find Themselves at a Crossroads in a Region Rocked by War and Revolution," *Time*, April 21, 2014, 38.

disengaged (i.e., not engaging in criminal behavior) while still being committed to a radical ideology.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, according to Koehler, monitoring and evaluating a radical's claim of disengagement can be assessed "fairly easily" merely by monitoring their arrest record (at least for those that get caught breaking the law). He goes on to note that it is practically impossible to determine and verify whether or not a terrorist's claim of "de-radicalization" (a change in their degree of acceptance of radical ideology) is credible.<sup>16</sup>

Horgan identified that de-radicalization and disengagement are two distinct changes, with one not necessarily leading to the other. He noted that "the disengaged terrorist may not necessarily be repentant or 'deradicalized' at all."<sup>17</sup>

It may be useful to draw the following parallels between *de-radicalization* and *disengagement*. De-radicalization implies *conflict resolution*. The de-radicalized individual no longer harbors intent to conduct violent activity for the cause. Disengagement, on the other hand, implies mere *conflict termination*. The disengaged radical still believes in violence for the cause, but is dissuaded from conducting violent acts. The ideal end-state, then for any DDP should be conflict resolution, or the de-radicalization of participants.

The challenges of evaluation being such as they are, perhaps states should focus on convincing radicals to disengage from terrorism, with the goal of preventing repeat offenses. This way, they can use statistics, such as recidivism rates, to determine the efficacy of such programs. Determining whether or not an individual has had a change of

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15. Koehler, "De-Radicalization and Disengagement Programs," 121-122. Koehler acknowledges Horgan, Dechesne, Bjørge, and Noricks in these definitions.

16. Ibid., 128.

17. Horgan, "Individual Disengagement," 27.

belief is subjective at best and is further complicated by the depth of their commitment to radical ideology – some are merely curious, others are strongly dedicated.

Koehler offers several additional criteria upon which to measure the effectiveness of DDPs. He urges they should be “sustainable and long lasting”, aspire to clearly defined goals (particularly noting whether or not an ideological change is desired), and “strive for the participant’s individual socio-economic self-sustainability.”<sup>18</sup> Clearly then, what constitutes success is an open question, and central to this is whether mere disengagement or full de-radicalization is the program’s goal. Horgan and Braddock note that, even if mere disengagement from terrorist activities is the focus of the intervention program, it is unclear whether or not de-radicalization is a pre-requisite for this.<sup>19</sup>

From a de-radicalization standpoint, there is no research focused on identifying “reliable indicators of successful de-radicalization”, so using metrics of any kind as quantifiable criteria for comparison between programs is quite problematic.<sup>20</sup>

Disengagement, on the other hand, is often monitored and judged on the basis of the absence of recidivism. This can theoretically be measured by intelligence and security services. Obtaining data and verifying outcomes may be impeded by a state’s willingness to share internal information with outside entities.

For individual disengagement, then, the best measure of success for our purposes is recidivism rate – whether or not, or to what degree DDP “graduates” avoid a return to

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18. Koehler, “De-Radicalization and Disengagement Programs,” 128.

19. John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, “Assessing the Effectiveness of Current De-Radicalization Initiatives and Identifying Implications for the Development of U.S.-Based Initiatives in Multiple Settings,” (College Park, MD: START, 2009), 7.

20. Ibid., 8.

violence. Although infrequent, group disengagement can occur when an entire terrorist or political group denounces violence and changes its ideology.

### **Case Selection Rationale**

This thesis compares three cases of de-radicalization/disengagement efforts from a wide variety of strategic environments. The selected cases cover both religious and nationalist radical groups and occur in host countries that are both majority Christian as well as majority Muslim. Two cases provide examples of individual de-radicalization/disengagement and one illustrates group disengagement. Furthermore, each of the programs selected are widely regarded as “successful”, the previously discussed challenges in defining success notwithstanding.<sup>21</sup> The German HAYAT Program is successful enough that it served as a model for similar programs in other countries. It was successfully transferred to Great Britain and there are discussions about exporting it to The Netherlands, Canada, Sweden, and Australia.<sup>22</sup> This may be reason enough to investigate them, even if de-radicalization data is lacking and disengagement data is limited and difficult to verify. Notably, both the German and Saudi programs are focused on de-radicalization and/or disengagement of Islamic extremist radicals.

It is often said that the family is the central unit and building block of society. Several DDPs capitalize on deep, traditional family connections and values to help exert a moderating influence on a radical family member. Appealing to family ties and

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21. Though judging the success of DDPs is subjective, some characteristics have identified “less successful” programs, including programs which “neglect...de-radicalization, rehabilitation and education” charges levied against the Yemeni Committee for Dialogue Program, in Hamed El-Said, *New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2015), 33. The Yemeni program was also criticized due to a lack of transparency and claiming suspect recidivism rates, in Horgan and Braddock, “Assessing the Effectiveness,” 36.

22. Koehler, “De-Radicalization and Disengagement Programs,” 145.

authority which pre-date the individual's radicalization, including the influence of radical leadership, can be an important factor in undoing the radicalization or at a minimum exerting a restraining influence on a wayward family member. The individual-centric programs examined here (the Saudi and German programs) enlist family support at some point along the intervention process, whether it be establishing contact to communicate with a foreign fighter, providing family members advice and intervention strategies to deal with a family member considering radicalizing, or relying on the influence of tribal leadership to prevent recidivism.

The Northern Ireland "Early Release Scheme" provides a counter-nationalist/separatist perspective, in contrast with the counter-religious extremist character of the other two cases. There are several elements of distinction about the Early Release Scheme, namely the unit of analysis and enforcement mechanisms. The Early Release Scheme resulted in entire group disengagement, while the German HAYAT Program and Saudi Counseling Program seek individual de-radicalization/disengagement. Regarding enforcement, the individual-centric programs relied on family/tribal bonds at some point along the de-radicalization/disengagement process or for enforcement. The group-disengagement achieved in Northern Ireland did not rely on family dynamics, but rather diplomatic agreement between legitimate state authorities and the recognized terrorist group authorities. Intra-group dynamics (allegiance and loyalty) served as the enforcement mechanisms to hold individuals in check, even if they disagreed with the group leadership's decision for collective disengagement and détente with the state, though in some cases splinter groups emerged.

Though the United States is not in a fight against a nationalist/separatist movement at home, the Northern Ireland case demonstrates the group disengagement process and enforcement mechanisms. This could inform U.S.-sponsored programs overseas in a partner nation where negotiation with named groups, as opposed to just trying to counter radicalization among individuals, is a possibility for ending *jihad*.

### **Limitations of Case Studies**

Ideally, we would hold all variables but one constant, to determine a correlation, or better yet, causality, between an independent variable and a dependent variable (i.e., compare a DDP focused on individuals following radical Islamic ideology in a Muslim country, where the enforcement method includes the family/tribe, with one where there is no such enforcement method). The sparse number of programs in place, and the wide variety of environments in which they operate, prevents such a scientific, one-variable-at-a-time comparison.

Nevertheless, the selected cases serve as a useful guide in framing policy proposals, as long as one considers the social and strategic environment in which each DDP operates. Since the goal is, ultimately, to formulate guidelines for a DDP suitable for implementation in the United States, or sponsored by the United States in partner nations, this thesis critically assesses the transferability of elements of the programs analyzed herein, to determine whether or not they could be so implemented.



## Chapter 3

### Case #1: Saudi Arabian Counseling Program

Al Qaida began conducting attacks against foreigners in Saudi Arabia in 1995.<sup>1</sup> By 2003, the frequency of Al Qaida attacks in Saudi Arabia increased and the target set expanded to include more Saudis.<sup>2</sup> Following several high profile attacks in Riyadh, Saudi officials responded by devising what became known as a “Counseling Program” to win the “war of ideas” by re-educating incarcerated terrorists on the moderate, non-violent, and state-approved version of Islam.<sup>3</sup> This program focused not only on correctional Islamic re-education, but also the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-radicals into society.<sup>4</sup>

The key tenets of this program center on prisoners’ discussions with religious authorities and psychologists on the Qu’ran, with the goal of persuading them that they had been deceived into believing and acting on improper interpretations of the Qu’ran, and then instructing them on the state-approved interpretation.<sup>5</sup> In addition to religious education and psychological evaluation, the Counseling Program includes social services for families of prisoners, replacement of lost income, health care, and other services.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Terrence Henry, “Get Out of Jihad Free. The Saudi government is betting that instead of just locking terrorists away, it can reform them,” *The Atlantic* (June 2007), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/06/get-out-of-jihad-free/305883/> (accessed January 5, 2016).

2. Ibid.

3. Horgan and Braddock, “Assessing the Effectiveness,” 37; and Boucek, “Extremist Reeducation and Rehabilitation,” 2007.

4. U.S. Department of State, “Country Reports on Terrorism, 2009,” <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2009/140886.htm> (accessed February 06, 2016).

5. Horgan and Braddock, “Assessing the Effectiveness,” 37.

6. Christopher Boucek, “Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia,” in *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement*, ed. Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (New York: Routledge, 2009), 216.

This helps the program maintain legitimacy and prevents insurgent groups from developing rapport with family members (and potentially turning them against the state), by providing needed support.<sup>7</sup>

The Counseling Program consists of an Advisory Committee with several specialized subcommittees which work together with the prisoners throughout the counseling process. During the initial counseling session, members of the Advisory Committee sit down with the prospective participant and explain the program. It is an optional program, but if successfully completed and the participant renounces the violent movement of which they are a part, they may potentially avoid prison time.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the Advisory Committee members explain that they are independent scholars and are neither employees of the security forces nor the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>9</sup> It is important to establish this disassociation with the “hard power” elements of state to maintain independence, credibility with other potential program participants, and overall program legitimacy. If participants were seen as collaborating with security forces or intelligence services to conduct counter-terrorist operations, participation would drop and the reconciliation and reintegration goals of the program would be severely undermined.

The Advisory Committee is divided into the Religious Subcommittee, the Psychological and Social Subcommittee, the Security Subcommittee, and the Media Subcommittee.<sup>10</sup> The Religious Subcommittee conducts the majority of the counseling work. Boucek found that,

Most detainees did not complete much education; instead the majority had been radicalized through extremist books, tapes, videos, and more recently

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7. Ibid.

8. Henry.

9. Boucek, “Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation,” 2009, 220.

10. Horgan and Braddock, “Assessing the Effectiveness,” 38-39.

the internet. The Counselling Program, therefore, seeks to ‘correct’ this misunderstanding by reintroducing and reinforcing the official state version of Islam. Because these individuals did not correctly learn the tenets of their faith originally, they were susceptible to extremist propaganda. As a result the program seeks to remove incorrect understandings of Islam and replace them with correct understandings.<sup>11</sup>

The Religious Subcommittee is composed of a mix of “clerics, other religious experts, and university scholars” the mission of which is to engage participants in “open discussion about their experiences and interpretations [of] the Qu’ran and Islamic duty.”<sup>12</sup>

The Religious Subcommittee sets a non-confrontational tone, approaching program participants as victims of those who would use them for violence, rather than criminals.<sup>13</sup>

In this manner, they can break down barriers to communication with the prisoners and obtain real, open dialogue with them. Their primary goal is to convince program participants of their misunderstanding of Islam, while teaching them the state-approved interpretation.<sup>14</sup>

The Saudi Counseling program marshals a holistic effort in its approach to de-radicalization. While the Religious Subcommittee conducts the primary de-radicalization efforts, it is supported by the other subcommittees. The Psychological and Social Subcommittee monitors program compliance and also determines the needs of the family members of the incarcerated individual.<sup>15</sup> The subcommittee provides not only replacement income when a primary breadwinner is imprisoned, but also addresses education needs for their children and healthcare needs for their family.<sup>16</sup> Assisting in

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11. Boucek, “Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation,” 2009, 216.

12. Horgan and Braddock, “Assessing the Effectiveness,” 39.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., 37.

15. Ibid., 39.

16. Boucek, “Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation,” 2009, 216.

replacing lost income and the other government provided social support helps ensure family stability throughout the prisoner's sentence. Failure to assist family members was identified as a vulnerability which may be exploited by terrorist organizations.<sup>17</sup>

The Security Subcommittee evaluates and monitors program participants throughout the counseling process and continues to monitor them after release.<sup>18</sup> In conjunction with the Religious and Psychological/Social Subcommittees, it also recommends prisoners for release.<sup>19</sup> The Media Subcommittee develops themes and associated materials to assist in messaging to program participants, but also counters extremist messaging in the media.<sup>20</sup>

The program curriculum itself consists of up to six weeks of sessions facilitated by religious clerics and social scientists. Throughout the counseling program, counselors ask participants why they did what they did and show them, by using the Saudi approved interpretation of the Qu'ran, how their actions and radical beliefs are inconsistent with true Islamic teaching.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, "participants are taught about relevant topics such as loyalty, terrorism, and the state-sanctioned rules of *jihad*."<sup>22</sup> Upon completion of the six-week counseling course, participants must pass both an examination and a psychological evaluation before moving on to "aftercare."<sup>23</sup>

While the religious education and counseling conducted in the six-week phase addressed the ideological changes necessary for de-radicalization, the aftercare phase of

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17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 219.

19. Horgan and Braddock, "Assessing the Effectiveness," 39.

20. Ibid. The Media Subcommittee develops anti-radicalization themed materials for program use and warnings against "adopt[ing] terrorist ideologies."

21. Horgan and Braddock, "Assessing the Effectiveness."

22. Ibid., 40.

23. Ibid.

the program addressed the more practical changes necessary for successful reintegration into society. “Aftercare” occurs at a Care Rehabilitation Center, at which program graduates experience “a lifestyle that is very different than one would encounter in prison.”<sup>24</sup> Program participants live with other inmates, are afforded access to athletic facilities, arts, crafts, and receive individually tailored treatments.<sup>25</sup> These kinds of holistic rehabilitation efforts help differentiate the Counseling program from mere incarceration. Furthermore, they demonstrate the Saudi government’s commitment to individual prisoner rehabilitation and reintegration, not just the gathering of intelligence for conducting raids or other counter-terrorism activities.

Released prisoners are required to check in with authorities periodically, as a condition of their release.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the state encourages and provides financial incentives for released prisoners to settle down, marry, and start families.<sup>27</sup> The state recognizes that men with family responsibilities are much less likely to become involved with terrorist organizations (though not a universal truth, as the 2 December 2015 San Bernardino shooter husband and wife duo had a small infant).<sup>28</sup>

The state provides these financial incentives to offset the burden and hardship that the family experiences when a family member is incarcerated. Boucek explains that “steps by the government to care for detainees’ families demonstrate that the regime is not seeking to punish them or their families.”<sup>29</sup> Additionally, this social support helps

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24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Boucek, “Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation,” 2009, 216.

27. Boucek, “Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation,” 2009, 217; and “Saudis helping freed terror suspects; Trying to pull militants away from terrorism,” *The Vancouver Province* (British Columbia), April 26, 2007.

28. Joel Achenbach and Sari Horwitz, “Who gets San Bernardino shooters' baby?” *Lowell Sun* (Massachusetts), December 15, 2015.

29. Boucek, “Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation,” 2009, 219.

reinforce the theme that the government actually cares about the well-being of individual citizens and their families, whereas the extremist organizations prey on “misled youth to advance their own agendas.”<sup>30</sup>

After successfully completing the counseling program, if their sentences are complete or if they qualify for early release, the prisoners are released, but will continue to be monitored by the state and must check in periodically with authorities.<sup>31</sup> One unique characteristic of the Saudi Counseling Program is that prisoners who are released after completing the program are *conditionally* returned to their families. The extended family is held responsible if their rehabilitated prisoner returns to violence, and the family honor concept exerts a strong influence in preventing such recidivism.<sup>32</sup>

### **Program Strengths**

If any program may be successful at de-radicalizing an Islamic radical, the Saudi Counseling program seems to have the strongest chances of success. The largest barrier to a state-run DDP is the perceived illegitimacy of any program sponsored by the state, because of the conflict of interest inherent in a state program. Responsible for the security of its citizens and within its territory, a state is highly motivated to counter any violent organization operating in its territory. For a state to convince prisoners to accept as legitimate, and participate in a de-radicalization program is no small feat. The Saudis leveraged two resources which provide legitimacy for their program: credible religious authority and family support.

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30. Ibid.

31. Ibid, 216.

32. Horgan and Braddock, “Assessing the Effectiveness,” 41; and Boucek, “Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation,” 2009, 217.

Saudi Arabia has a history of using religious figures and authorities in prison rehabilitation programs.<sup>33</sup> This makes it fairly easy for prisoners to accept not only the idea of a rehabilitation program, but also that religious clerics and scholars are the entities conducting the ideological rehabilitation. The religious authority over which the state holds sway builds legitimacy for the program.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, several former radicals gave up their violent beliefs and joined the Counseling Program themselves, which also adds credibility to the program.<sup>35</sup>

Though religious authority is paramount in the de-radicalization and counseling effort, family support is crucial to ensuring the prisoner, once released, does not return to violence. Saudi culture places high value on family responsibility, as evident by concepts of family honor.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the restraining effect of a prisoner's family plays a significant role in preventing a released program graduate from returning to violence. The Saudi program also holds family members "financially and socially responsible if a participant falls back into terrorism."<sup>37</sup> Leveraging family members to exert social pressure over program graduates in an effort to reinforce their commitment to abstain from terrorism is perhaps the greatest strength of the Saudi Counseling Program.

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33. Boucek, "Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation," 2009, 213.

34. Ibid., 216.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., 217.

37. Horgan and Braddock, "Assessing the Effectiveness," 41. In Christopher Boucek, "The Saudi Process of Repatriating and Reintegrating Guantanamo Returnees," *CTC Sentinel* 1, no 1 (December 2007), <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-saudi-process-of-repatriating-and-reintegrating-guantanamo-returnees>, (accessed February 7, 2016), the author learned from an interview with Prince Muhammed bin Nayef, that repatriated Guantanamo inmates meet with family members of those still incarcerated in Guantanamo. They understand that if they reoffend, "their comrades who they left at Guantanamo will not return." Boucek writes, "This aspect of collective responsibility is a common thread in Saudi rehabilitation and after-care programs."

## Program Weaknesses

The program's heavy reliance on financial support throughout all phases of the program stands as a significant weakness, and a possible challenge to the transferability of this program to a financially constrained, individualistic society such as the United States. The Counseling Program provides income replacement and family support while participants undergo counseling, and provides financial incentives for particular behavior (like settling down to marry).<sup>38</sup> These benefits certainly resemble paying for good behavior, and would likely not sit well with American tax payers, if elements of such a system were replicated by the United States.

Furthermore, this program advocates a state-approved version of Islam. This may include redefining for the prisoners, the appropriate time and place for acceptable *jihad*. Since the Saudi Program was born out of a desire to combat domestic terrorism, it emphasizes the impermissible nature of conducting violent *jihad* in their Muslim-controlled homeland.<sup>39</sup> This leaves open the acceptability of conducting violent *jihad* in a foreign country fighting a western military presence, such as Afghanistan or Iraq.<sup>40</sup> This fact limits the transferability of the Saudi Program to the U.S., since the U.S. does not condone legitimate *jihad* in any case, unlike the Sunni majority in Saudi Arabia.

## Results and Effectiveness

Though practically impossible to measure a change of one's adherence to radical ideology, which would be necessary to prove de-radicalization, disengagement success,

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38. Boucek, "Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation," 2009, 216-217.

39. Angel Rabasa, et al., *Deradicalizing Islamic Extremists* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2010), xvi.

40. Ibid., 62-63. Rabasa claims that the Saudi interpretation has overlap with extremist ideology, and that violence is justified, just not within Saudi Arabia or against Sunni Muslims. Therefore, travelling to a foreign theater of war to conduct *jihad* is permissible.



on the other hand, can be approximated by measuring recidivism rates among program graduates. Those program graduates who reoffend have clearly not disengaged. Those who avoid highlighting themselves to the authorities are presumed to have disengaged.

Assessing the effectiveness of this program depends almost entirely on the Saudi government's willingness to share the data. The most recent Department of State Country Report on Terrorism with results of the Saudi Counseling program is from 2010, and cites the following data from the Saudi Ministry of the Interior: "[the] recidivism [rate]... for former Guantanamo detainees ... [is approximately] 20 percent and for all other program participants ... [the recidivism rate is] less than 10 percent."<sup>41</sup> These 10-20 percent recidivism rates certainly indicate a successful program. Yet the clarity with which we view the effectiveness of the program is confounded by a glut of government assistance and benefits afforded to program graduates and their families. This generous assistance may also complicate transferability of this program to the United States.

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41. U.S. Department of State, "Country Reports on Terrorism, 2010," August 18, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2010/170257.htm> (accessed February 6, 2016). Although the State Department Country Reports on Terrorism (published annually) continue to include brief comments on the Saudi Prison De-radicalization Program, more recent reports do not comment on the results or effectiveness of the program.

## Chapter 4

### Case #2: German HAYAT Program

The German state-sponsored HAYAT program specializes in providing counseling to family members of individuals along various stages of the radicalization process, focused specifically on countering Islamic extremism related to the foreign fighter problem set. Though the program is funded by a German federal office, it is operated by a nation-wide NGO.<sup>1</sup> The program leverages an experienced team of “former high ranking police officers, experts in terrorism and Islamism” and “has contact point officers in every [German]... intelligence and criminal police department.”<sup>2</sup> It capitalizes on existing family ties between an individual who may be radicalizing and his or her concerned family members. The goals of the HAYAT program are to prevent foreign fighters from travelling to fight, convince them to disengage from the fight and return home if they have already travelled, and to de-radicalize them once they return home.<sup>3</sup>

The HAYAT program focuses on strengthening and using family and social bonds to influence a family member considering travelling overseas as a foreign terrorist fighter. Since family and friends tend to be held in high esteem, they are an invaluable resource in affecting the decision-making of the radicalizing individual. The HAYAT counseling program leverages this fact by providing concerned family members and friends with ways for debating and methods of challenging radical ideology.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Koehler, "De-Radicalization and Disengagement Programs," 144.

2. Ibid., 143.

3. Ibid., 144.

4. Ibid., 125.

Unlike the Saudi Counseling program, the participants of which were arrested already, the German HAYAT program endeavors to de-radicalize individuals who are not in custody. The HAYAT program provides a nationwide telephone hotline (available around the clock), which provides free advice and counseling for family members and friends of potentially radicalizing individuals. This NGO then refers the callers to local partner organizations for further action, counseling, and advice.<sup>5</sup>

The program relies on existing, or re-establishing family bonds, since this has proven a crucial element of the counseling process.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, any existing family conflicts must be identified and worked out.<sup>7</sup> HAYAT's social workers and psychologists help achieve this through family counseling. Strengthening the family "affective environment" provides the best opportunity for de-radicalizing or preventing the radicalization of a potential radical.<sup>8</sup> Koehler describes his objections to allowing direct participation in counseling by the radicalized individual. He claims that including the radicalized individual in the counseling would be

Not only pointless but also counter-productive... [Since] the counselling service... [would] be interpreted as [an] ideological tool for manipulation of the adversarial system...and even worse, every effort on the part of relatives... [would be] interpreted as [an] externally controlled process with the goal of abandoning one's faith.<sup>9</sup>

Avoiding the perception of interference with one's own interpretation of his or her religion stands as a significant restraint in the execution of the HAYAT program.

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5. Ibid., 144.

6. Ibid., 140. The HAYAT program relies on the assumption that the family is a moderating influence on a potential radical. This assumption is not always true, as one sibling may draw another towards terrorism, as with the Tsarnaev brothers. Anne Speckhard, "The Boston Marathon Bombers: the Lethal Cocktail that Turned Troubled Youth to Terrorism," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 7, no. 3 (June 2013). <http://terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/268/540> (accessed 31 March 2016).

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., 141.

9. Ibid.

Counseling continues for the family, and counsellors are available to assist the family in dealing with any emergent crises throughout the counseling process. Meanwhile, an “expert risk assessment team” seeks to identify the potential risk posed by the concerned individual, by “using a combination of concrete indicators and years of experience.”<sup>10</sup>

Following risk assessment, intervention goals are tailored based on the specifics of the foreign fighter case, namely, how far down the path towards becoming a foreign fighter the individual has come. If the family member has not yet departed to a foreign country, the family is counseled to maintain a “positive family environment based on respect...but also [to] show... concern” and to do whatever it can to prevent the family member from travelling in the first place.<sup>11</sup> Counselors discourage actions such as threatening to turn one in to the authorities or withholding their passport, because it increases “repressive pressure” on the individual and undermines fostering a positive environment.<sup>12</sup>

In cases where the relative already left Germany, overall goals include preventing them from conducting violent actions and convincing them to return home. Accordingly, establishing communications with the relative is of primary importance.<sup>13</sup> The HAYAT team includes representatives from every German intelligence agency and police department.<sup>14</sup> The program endeavors to coach family members in their engagement with the radicalized individual. Together, the HAYAT team and family members hope to

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10. Ibid., 142.

11. Ibid., 143.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

bring back the radical family member, possibly even before he or she has conducted any terrorist acts.<sup>15</sup> If the radical has carried out illegal activity (e.g., joined a terrorist group, engaged in fighting, etc.) they will likely be arrested. At that point, HAYAT's role remains counseling the family and assisting the individual with de-radicalization once in prison, if he or she opts to participate.<sup>16</sup>

If and when the individual returns from overseas, they may very well be questioned by authorities.<sup>17</sup> Program officials work collaboratively with family members to provide them with resources, options, and advice to help prevent further radicalization and ultimately affect de-radicalization of their family member. Maintaining a strong family environment will make it “more difficult... to radicalize further, or engage in security related behavior undetected.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, a positive family environment should contribute to any potential decision by the family member to de-radicalize.

### **Program Strengths**

The HAYAT program's greatest strength is that it leverages existing family bonds. The people in the best position for slowing and reversing an individual's radicalization process are those closest to him or her, namely the family. Providing an alternative to the social bonds offered by the radical organization by bolstering family ties helps meet the affective needs of the radicalized individual, contributes to disengagement goals, and possibly helps slow or reverse the radicalization process.

Additionally, the program enacts a holistic approach towards de-radicalization. Though initial contact occurs only through the family members, a cross-section of experts

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15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 144.

17. Ibid., 143.

18. Ibid., 144.

including “religious figures, security [personnel], psychologists, family therapists and different authorities ... [are] coordinated for external assistance as well as for the counselling process at the right time.”<sup>19</sup> This holistic approach bolsters the chances of a successful de-radicalization. Furthermore, HAYAT attends to practical needs for a de-radicalizing individual, such as training and assistance in job placement.<sup>20</sup> Replacing any radical aspirations with practical activities such as training and employment helps facilitate the individual’s reintegration.

### **Program Weaknesses**

Koehler claims that direct counseling of the radicalizing individual is counterproductive, but it seems that failing to conduct counseling to counter the radical ideology fails to address the root cause of the situation – the person’s belief in a radical Islamic ideology. Failing to conduct compulsory religious dialogue to alter the person’s understanding of the permissibility of violence, misses the mark. Conflict resolution requires giving up the radical ideology. By its lack of compulsory religious dialogue, the HAYAT program undermines its de-radicalization goal, limiting itself to disengagement.

The HAYAT program operates amidst the tension between the free exercise of one’s religion and “security relevant radicalization.”<sup>21</sup> Since liberal democracies, Germany included, generally protect the civil liberties of free speech, assembly, and religion, Koehler notes the difficulty, in such a society, of “attempt[ing] to change even parts of an individual faith.”<sup>22</sup> A state-imposed restriction on the free exercise of one’s religion in some ways impinges on this freedom. Though most would agree that

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19. Ibid., 142.

20. Ibid., 141.

21. Ibid., 140.

22. Ibid., 131.

intervention to prevent violence remains a valid state activity (because one person's right to religious freedom is not greater than another person's right to life), Germany remains careful to avoid a situation where the state conducts de-radicalization counseling, or pushes a certain interpretation of Islam.

A potential conflict of interest and threat to program legitimacy could arise if state security and intelligence services prioritize gaining information and informants over the needs of the radicalized person.<sup>23</sup> Counseling for the family members focuses on providing assistance for, and the establishment of trust with, the radicalized individual, to prevent him or her from violent activity, and ultimately to de-radicalize. If the motive is gathering intelligence for dismantling a terrorist network or other classical counter-terrorism objectives, the program risks losing its legitimacy in the minds of the radicalized individual, his or her family members, and other group members who could be de-radicalized.<sup>24</sup> If this occurs, it could be damaging to the program. The HAYAT program endeavors to side-step this pitfall by ensuring that "civil society and 'soft approaches'" remain cornerstones of the program.<sup>25</sup> To this end, HAYAT ensures that the security services are involved only on the periphery, and psychologists, social scientists, and other non-security affiliated professionals take the lead in counseling and other front lines program work.

Finally, although de-radicalization is its stated goal, the program more closely resembles a disengagement program since it lacks compulsory Islamic re-education. If the state teaches a radical how to follow the laws precisely, he may learn to avoid the

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23. Ibid., 126.

24. Ibid., 121.

25. Ibid.

behaviors which alarm authorities, but absent any true change of heart may still actively support violent activity. Demonstrating to an individual how to avoid breaking the law without changing his radical beliefs teaches him to be more effective at subverting society in pursuit of radical objectives.<sup>26</sup>

## **Results and Effectiveness**

Like all de-radicalization programs, measuring success is challenging since demonstrating an absolute change in an individual's belief system is difficult.<sup>27</sup> However, since HAYAT concerns specific activities relating to foreign fighters, preventing a radical from travelling overseas, or bringing one home safely (and hopefully crime-free) can be measured. Koehler reported the following HAYAT results, as of May 2014:

Since the launch of the counselling service, 73 cases... were handled... In at least 20 cases there is a very high security relevancy and danger given for the radicalized persons and third parties. In these cases involvement in terrorist organizations has occurred, attacks have been planned or at least some form of highly illegal action has been pre-empted (including one domestic terrorism case and at least eight 'Foreign Fighters').<sup>28</sup>

Koehler reports 15 cases where "conflict-laden" situations were "mitigated through... pacification" and the "reestablishment of emotional bonds and communication" and 17 cases which were closed and no longer required further counseling.<sup>29</sup> On balance, preventing illegal activity in nine of twenty cases (45%) with "high security relevancy" is a solid result, but that still leaves a majority (55%) of cases where illegal activity could not be prevented.

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26. Ibid., 131-132.

27. Ibid., 128.

28. Ibid., 145.

29. Ibid.



## Chapter 5

### Case #3: Northern Ireland's "Early Release Scheme"

The long standing struggle over Northern Ireland, between Unionists favoring the status quo, Northern Ireland's political affiliation with the United Kingdom, and Irish Republicans favoring reunification with Ireland, bred years of violence including terrorist attacks. After decades of strife and failed conflict resolution initiatives, in 1998 the two sides achieved a tenuous settlement called the "Good Friday Agreement" (or Belfast Agreement).<sup>1</sup>

Part of this agreement, to which the governments of the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, and several Northern Irish political parties (including Sinn Fein) acceded, included provisions for the early release of convicted terrorists that were members of paramilitary groups.<sup>2</sup> Though not a de-radicalization program per se, the Early Release Scheme (as it came to be known) proved a highly successful, state-run disengagement program.<sup>3</sup> Some elements crucial to the success of the program include the fact that political prisoners were conditionally released on a case-by-case basis and were monitored by an independent government agency. Perhaps most importantly, prisoners were only released so long as they, and the paramilitary group to which they belong, abstained from further violence. Loyalty to the group and its members restrained would-be offenders from taking violent action, lest their comrades be re-arrested.

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1. Roger Mac Ginty, Orla T. Muldoon, and Neil Ferguson, "No War, No Peace: Northern Ireland after the Agreement," *Political Psychology* 28, no. 1 (2007): 1, 3.

<http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ndueproxy.idm.oclc.org/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=42356c8e-d515-4815-bcab-0e711185c1c7%40sessionmgr113&hid=104> (accessed March 31, 2016).

2. Horgan and Braddock, "Assessing the Effectiveness," 10-11.

3. Ibid., 11.

According to Horgan and Braddock, by “offering release to political prisoners, the Belfast Agreement effectively provided a strong incentive for non-signatories to decommission and work towards a peaceful resolution.”<sup>4</sup> This also encouraged signatories to maintain their obligations under the agreement and provided a stabilizing force in the erstwhile volatile environment.

### **Program Strengths**

The Belfast Agreement incorporated several elements which helped make it successful. The stabilizing effect of the ceasefire, independent monitoring of the ceasefire terms, and practical reintegration measures all contributed to stability in the environment after the release of the prisoners.

By releasing individual convicted terrorists who belonged to groups which signed the agreement, the state created a stabilizing effect because the signatories now had an incentive to maintain the peace. If the groups (or the individuals) returned to violence, any prisoners affiliated with the re-engaging group, who were previously released under this program, would return to prison to complete their sentences. Individual violent prisoners restrained from returning to violence out of both loyalty to the group and the specter of an unserved sentence, which would be completed in addition to any new sentence upon a return to violence.<sup>5</sup> Other group members were held in check by the threat of re-incarceration for their released comrades. Horgan and Braddock assert that program success was built on “the belief that if the [radical] movement was on ceasefire,

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4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

the leadership would exercise extreme authoritative control over its members” to ensure compliance.<sup>6</sup>

Since the Belfast Agreement at the core was a disengagement program (not a de-radicalization one), monitoring released prisoners was a crucial element. It included provision for an Independent Monitoring Commission to monitor and report on paramilitary groups that signed the Agreement.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the disincentives from violence, the Belfast Agreement contained some practical re-integration measures for released prisoners, including job training, education, and assistance in finding employment.<sup>8</sup>

### **Program Weaknesses**

Release of convicted violent radicals prior to serving out their sentences caused many (primarily Unionists, and relatives of victims) to levy claims that the Belfast Agreement was simply appeasement.<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, it drew some opposition.

Like the other programs, the Early Release Scheme offered practical assistance finding employment, or improving job-related skills. Unlike the others, though, the Northern Irish government promised direct financial assistance to the released prisoners.<sup>10</sup> The transactional nature of this provision (dissuading a radical from conducting attacks by transfers of money) seems a lot like paying for good behavior.

A final weakness in the Early Release Scheme is that factions more committed to violence splintered from the mainstream group when group leadership disengaged.<sup>11</sup>

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6. Ibid., 16.

7. Ibid., 15.

8. Ibid., 12.

9. Ibid., 13, 15.

10. Ibid., 13.

11. Mac Ginty, Muldoon, and Ferguson, 5.

## Results and Effectiveness

Ten years after the conclusion of the Belfast Agreement, Law professor Kieran McEvoy summarized the results of the program to date. “Of the 450 prisoners released early, 20 have had their licences revoked. Sixteen of these were for terrorist-related activities.”<sup>12</sup> Sixteen of 450 corresponds to a recidivism rate of roughly 3.5%. Compared to the benchmark recidivism rate for non-terrorist related prisoners in Northern Ireland (48% within two years of release, according to McEvoy), those released under the Belfast Agreement were over 13 times less likely to reoffend.<sup>13</sup>

Clearly, the Early Release Scheme of the Belfast Agreement contributed significantly to the group disengagement outcome and the prevention of recidivism. Unfortunately, these state intervention strategies may not be transferable when dealing with religious or ideologically motivated extremists. The Early Release Scheme relies on camaraderie, loyalty to group members, and the threat of re-incarceration as enforcement mechanisms. The loss of any one Islamic extremist’s life or freedom will hardly serve as a disincentive from terrorist attacks when adherents to their ideology often employ suicide attacks. Such tactics show a disregard for the value of human life, even the lives of fellow radicals. Additionally, the group disengagement dynamics which made the Belfast Agreement possible are likely not present when dealing with disparate, lone-wolf attackers, radicalized on-line.

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12. Dan Keenan, “Ex-prisoners ‘helped resolve conflict,’” *The Irish Times*, March 1, 2008.

13. Ibid.

## Chapter 6

### Case Study Comparison and Analysis

We will now turn to comparing and analyzing the case studies to draw the appropriate lessons, identify best practices, and evaluate their applicability in a United States de-radicalization/disengagement program. Figure 1 lists elements of analysis from the various DDPs. The remainder of this chapter discusses the findings.

**Figure 1. A comparison of de-radicalization/disengagement programs and transferability recommendations.**

PROGRAM ELEMENT	PROGRAM			TRANSFERABILITY	
	Saudi Counseling Program	German HAYAT Program	N. Ireland Early Release Scheme	To U.S.	To U.S. Partner
Character of Conflict	Religious	Religious	Nationalist/ Separatist	Religious	Religious
Program Goal	De-rad & Disengage	Disengage <sup>1</sup>	Disengage	De-rad & Disengage	De-rad & Disengage
Individual or Group	Individual	Individual	Group	Individual	Individual
Ideological Counseling	Y	Optional	N/A	Y	Y
Family Counseling	N	Y	N	Y	Y
Practical Support Measures	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Disengage Guarantee – Type	Y - Family	N	Y – Group	N	Y - Family
Resolution or Termination? <sup>2</sup>	Resolution	Termination	Resolution	Resolution	Resolution
Success Rate <sup>3</sup>	80-90% <sup>4</sup>	45%	96.5%		

#### Legend

Y - Indicates program contains specified program element

N - Indicates program does not contain specified program element

Optional - Indicates specified element is not compulsory for program participants

#### Notes

1 - The German HAYAT Program aims at both de-radicalization and disengagement, but without mandatory ideological counseling, it is more of a disengagement-only program.

2 - Resolution indicates motivation for continued violence is removed and root causes have been addressed. Termination indicates grievances may still be central to a person's belief.

3 - Success for prison-based programs (Saudi & N. Ireland) is the absence of recidivism. For the German program, which is not prison-based, success is the prevention of illegal behavior.

4 - The recidivism rate for Guantanamo returnees is ~ 20%. The recidivism rate for all other returnees is <10%.

## **De-radicalization or Disengagement?**

The most effective approaches include both de-radicalization and disengagement elements. Disengagement will prevent violent attacks, but carries a high price, and may not last if the disengaged radical finds reason to reengage. This is mere conflict termination. De-radicalization, if attained, provides conflict resolution for the individual, or possibly all individuals affiliated with a group (in the case of group de-radicalization).

Undoubtedly, the Saudi program is a strong example of a whole-of-society de-radicalization effort combined with sufficient practical disengagement elements which encourage graduates to remain disengaged. The centerpiece of the de-radicalization effort is ideological rehabilitation in the form of religious counseling, which defuses radical beliefs and replaces them with a state-approved religious perspective. Though tough to achieve and tougher still to prove, ideological rehabilitation addresses the root cause. Ideological rehabilitation alone contributes to the prisoners' de-radicalization. Notably, this counseling can only be conducted credibly by competent authority (i.e., religious figures or scholars).

For participants in the Saudi program, religious counseling is compulsory. In the German program, counseling might be conducted if agreed to by the family and the advisors, but it is not mandatory. In Germany, de-radicalization, if it comes at all, comes from kinship and better alternatives (i.e., employment). Accordingly, the German HAYAT program is really more of a disengagement scheme, which offers a chance of de-radicalization, than a true de-radicalization program.

Both programs (Saudi and German) invoke whole-of-government efforts, including financial incentives and social restraining measures to achieve disengagement.

The differences in effectiveness (80-90% disengagement reported in the Saudi program, versus 45% disengagement reported in the German program) can be attributed to the robustness of the Saudi de-radicalization initiatives embedded in the program (i.e., religious counseling). This counseling, when successful, addressed the root cause of the radicals' propensity to offend by de-radicalizing them. Religious counseling in the German program was optional, rendering HAYAT more of a disengagement program than a true de-radicalization program.

The Early Release Scheme in Northern Ireland was a disengagement scheme. It used a similar holistic approach, provided incentives for continued disengagement, alternative employment, and leveraged the restraining effects of the ceasefire, paroled prisoners, and group loyalty. Its lasting effectiveness (disengagement rate above 96%) was due to the political reconciliation which occurred along with the early release of prisoners. Together these addressed root causes and contributed to conflict resolution.

### **Religious Expression Free from State Interference**

The Western mores of the free exercise of religion, and specifically, the Freedom of Religion as protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, may pose an obstacle to implementing the religious counseling elements of certain de-radicalization programs in the United States. The German HAYAT program navigated this ideological objection by partnering with non-governmental organizations and ensuring they are the lead agencies in any religious counseling conducted.<sup>1</sup> The Saudi program, similarly, used independent clerics and scholars, not state employees, for its religious intervention.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Ibid., 144.

2. Boucek, "Extremist Re-education and Rehabilitation," 2009, 220.

Although it must be carried out judiciously and with due regard for the limits of state intervention, religious counseling may occur, provided NGOs and private entities are the lead elements in the process. Furthermore, it is a key component of achieving de-radicalization, as opposed to merely disengagement. The U.S. could easily support religious counseling in de-radicalization programs in partner nations overseas.

### **Group or Individual Programs**

The Northern Ireland case demonstrates the far-reaching power of group disengagement. Regardless of any individual de-radicalization or disengagement decision, when a group disengages via negotiated settlement (i.e., a ceasefire) or de-radicalizes entirely, its members are restrained from conducting further attacks by group loyalty on several levels.<sup>3</sup> Loyalty to group leadership dissuades members from violence out of respect for the leader's decision (or possibly fear of an authoritarian leader). Loyalty to previously incarcerated group members dissuades them out of camaraderie, because a return to violence by any in the group will end their parole. The Good Friday Agreement contained such negotiated provisions.<sup>4</sup> The Northern Ireland case illustrates the moderating effect a signed ceasefire can have on a group's residual propensity for violence.

Horgan and Braddock maintain that "a lasting peace can only be established if political prisoners are set free."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, since the goal is not only peace but also conflict resolution, it stands to reason some sort of prisoner release is essential to

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3. For more examples of groups de-radicalizing entirely, see discussion of Egyptian groups, Gama'a al-Islamiya, and the Jihad in Rashwan, "The Renunciation of Violence."

4. "Northern Ireland Peace Agreement," Prisoners, paragraph 2, <http://peacemaker.un.org/uk-ireland-good-friday98> (accessed on November 29, 2015).

5. Horgan and Braddock, "Assessing the Effectiveness," 14-15.



achieving lasting disengagement. This highlights one of the strengths of the Belfast Agreement in Northern Ireland. The conditional release of political prisoners contributed to addressing grievances, de-escalating tensions between antagonists, and resolving the conflict so that lasting peace could stand a chance. Group disengagement, achieved in this manner, offers a chance for conflict resolution in a way individually targeted programs do not. The combination of addressing grievances and the release and reintegration of political prisoners, together with a binding, monitored, and enforceable ceasefire shows, as in Northern Ireland, that negotiation can contribute to conflict resolution between a radical group and the target government.

Programs focused on individual de-radicalization attempt to achieve conflict resolution by altering the belief of the individual, although the political environment remains unchanged from the ‘intolerable’ previous environment under which they originally committed violence. Successful individual de-radicalization, therefore, relies on the individual. The ability to achieve lasting de-radicalization amongst many individuals may vary widely. Group de-radicalization changes the environment, usually addressing long-standing grievances through negotiation. Group de-radicalization, therefore, has a greater potential to resolve underlying conflicts than individual de-radicalization. (i.e., if Al Qaeda reached détente with the United States, rather than individual radicals giving up the cause).

Unfortunately, disengagement programs are not universally transferable. The national/separatist nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland is fundamentally different from the religious/ideological nature of conflicts with Islamic extremists. Therefore, negotiation leading to ceasefire and group disengagement with a religious, ideologically

motivated extremist group is likely impractical. The transferability of the Northern Ireland disengagement efforts is therefore limited.

There are also limits to the applicability of group de-radicalization. Effective group de-radicalization hinges on an assumption of loyalty by the members to the group and a willingness to abide by group leaders' decisions. Terror groups often splinter if members disagree with a de-radicalization/disengagement decision made by the group leadership.<sup>6</sup> Also, so-called "lone wolf" attacks, or other leaderless resistance movements may be impervious to group de-radicalization and disengagement efforts, such as a negotiated cease-fire, since they answer to no central authority. The above limitations notwithstanding, if attainable, group de-radicalization is preferable to individual de-radicalization.

### **Practical Support Measures**

Each of the DDPs analyzed here included some sort of practical (i.e., financial) benefits for either the member or his/her family. These practical measures contribute towards the disengagement goal. Measures such as education, job training, assistance finding employment (in all three programs analyzed above), and state-provided assistance settling down and starting a family (in the Saudi program) further help bridge the individual from radicalism to stable, employed, and de-radicalized life. Also, the family-oriented measures of the Saudi program (such as education for family members, or lost wage replacement) help stave off radicalization of family members, who might fall prey to radical organizations seeking to provide for their basic needs.

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6. Holly Fletcher, "IRA Splinter Groups (U.K., separatists)," Council on Foreign Relations, (May 21, 2008), <http://www.cfr.org/separatist-terrorism/ira-splinter-groups-uk-separatists/p9239> (accessed February 8, 2016). After the Belfast Agreement was signed, two violent splinter groups emerged from the IRA, the Continuity IRA and the Real IRA.

Though vulnerable to charges of ‘buying good behavior’, these practical measures are useful in transitioning the radical from involvement in terrorism. If a state is willing to commit funds towards encouraging the radical to start a new life, it is a worthwhile investment. Practical support measures work best when accompanied by ideological rehabilitation and social restraining initiatives.

### **The Family as a Unit of Analysis**

Successful disengagement requires the individual have support from some social group to counter the pull of the violent extremist organization. The keystone of the Saudi program’s disengagement goal is its reliance on pressure from a released prisoner’s extended family to provide this support and prevent him from re-engaging. The concepts of familial honor, and threats of financial penalty if the released prisoner returns to terrorism underpin this enforcement mechanism. In this way, family members become “guarantors of the former radical’s [reformed] behavior.”<sup>7</sup> This contributes brilliantly to the lasting disengagement, and potentially even de-radicalization of Saudi Counseling Program graduates. The German HAYAT program focuses on leveraging existing family bonds into a disengagement influence on program participants, but without the pledge of family honor or threat of financial penalty.

Though a great strength of the Saudi Counseling Program, in the United States the family unit is unlikely to serve the same purpose in any legal framework associated with prisoner release or accountability. Forms of traditional justice in Saudi Arabia often capitalize on familial or tribal bonds. The justice system in the United States, on the other hand, focuses on the individual and the state as primary actors. Releasing a

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7. Rabasa, xviii.

‘reformed’ prisoner on the recognizance of his family to keep him or her from reverting back to violence is a proposition unlikely to work in the United States, and antithetical to its ruggedly individualistic culture.

Family accountability in maintaining disengagement of a former radical is a remarkable method of preventing recidivism. However, it must be culturally possible and appropriate. The United States should encourage such components in programs in appropriate partner nation programs (subject to cultural appropriateness). Henry notes that the U.S.-run prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba would not support replication of the Saudi program, due to the lack of prisoners’ family members in the community<sup>8</sup> (to whom would they be released?). The family can still maintain a role in DDPs, even in the United States, using the German model, by providing the family with intervention strategies and encouraging development and maintenance of a strong family environment. This could potentially be useful against would-be “lone wolf” attackers. In any case, the United States should seek to leverage the radical’s family, as a hedge against radicalization and a tool to affect de-radicalization and disengagement, where possible.

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8. Henry.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Recommendations and Conclusions**

Devising a state intervention program to prevent a return to violence for radical extremists in the United States is limited by the state's legal framework (including the First Amendment) as well as social and cultural norms. These facts prevent the direct transferability of some of the elements of foreign DDPs to a United States counterpart. That being said, some limited recommendations still arise from the case studies presented in this thesis.

First, the United States should focus its efforts on crafting an effective de-radicalization strategy rather than trying to ensure radicals merely disengage. Though if the state advocates one 'more correct' form of any particular religion, as is required in the ideological counseling necessary for de-radicalization of Islamic extremists, the U.S. must allow NGOs to coordinate the conduct of religious counseling from competent authority. This way, it can avoid the aforementioned breaches of legal and customary boundaries. This recommendation also pertains to partner nations overseas.

Second, within the bounds of civil liberties, policymakers should encourage family members to contact law enforcement or NGOs if they suspect a case of possible radicalization or foreign fighter ideation. United States' law enforcement and intelligence agencies should collaborate with NGOs and the family to devise an individually tailored intervention strategy (not unlike tailored programs developed by social workers) – in effect, using all available social levers of power – to prevent further radicalization and help promote disengagement. NGOs need to be in the lead, but supported by law enforcement and the intelligence services.

Third, the United States must devise a way to rely on the restraining effect of the family unit, in its individual disengagement efforts. Perhaps parole terms could be linked to immediate or extended family members, in an effort to import a best practice from the Saudi program. Absent any group disengagement, the family network is the next best way to exert a stabilizing, social pressure to discourage the individual from returning to violence.

Fourth, de-radicalization and disengagement programs should not neglect practical measures of reintegration. A fighter may be more willing to *remain* disengaged if he has a better option. Job training, education, and assistance finding employment may be problematic in war-torn or failed states, and unpopular at home due to the cost and competing demands for the required funds. Nevertheless, the Saudi, German, and Northern Irish programs are successful in part due to the practical measures and their associated funding. The U.S. should support practical reintegration assistance measures in any DDP, at home or in a partner nation. If it could encourage jihadists to abandon terrorism, perhaps the United States could avoid spending billions fighting the next war.

Finally, where practical, and in cooperation with partnered nations overseas, the United States should pursue ceasefire agreements with radical groups. Though this runs counter to the United States' longstanding abstinence from negotiating with terrorists, if mutually agreeable terms can be found the intra-group loyalty should have a strong restraining effect on preventing individual radicals from breaking a ceasefire. Although like-minded "affiliates and adherents" may splinter from a group party to a cease fire, thereby reducing its overall effectiveness, group restraining initiatives such as negotiated settlements are nonetheless extremely valuable. The benefits of group disengagement

over individual disengagement are clear: the restraining effect of family pressure on an individual to disengage (or remain disengaged) is compounded when the group with which the radical identifies also disengages. Disengagement by the group (via ceasefire or other group de-radicalization or disengagement initiative) discourages and delegitimizes further violence in that group's name and by its membership (at least by members remaining loyal to the group). In fact, legitimacy of the cause itself may suffer, if group leadership de-radicalizes and renounces violence.

In conclusion, the United States still has some latitude within which to build a de-radicalization policy for radical Islamic terrorists, despite its social, cultural, and legal environment. It must act creatively, challenge existing policies, and adopt the best practices of de-radicalization/disengagement programs from its partners in the Global War on Terror. Specifically, the United States should devise a program which capitalizes on hierarchical, intra-group pressure to influence radicals to remain disengaged when one's group collectively disengages. The United States should partner with NGOs to provide the ideological counseling which is crucial for de-radicalization and conflict resolution, assist radicals transitioning to de-radicalized life, and provide practical re-integration assistance. Finally, it should pursue programs which involve radicals' family members in their individual disengagement prescription, including parole maintenance, to capitalize on family and social pressures to maintain disengagement. In this way, the United States may be able to make practical gains against radical Islamic ideology and encourage individuals to abandon *jihad*.

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## **Vita**

Commander Christopher "Screech" Hayter was commissioned into the United States Navy from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1998 and became a Naval Aviator. His operational tours include a Junior Officer tour in the VFA-81 "Sunliners" and a Department Head tour in the VFA-87 "Golden Warriors", flying the F/A-18 Hornet, both homeported in Virginia Beach, VA where he completed a total of three combat deployments. His shore assignments include an instructor tour flying the F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet with VFA-106 in Virginia Beach, where he served as Strike Phase Head and a Global Support Assignment in Al Asad, Iraq where he served as Base Command Group Administrative Officer. Most recently, he was assigned to Joint Duty at Headquarters U.S. European Command in Stuttgart, where he served as a planner in the J35 Special Operations Branch. Commander Hayter holds Masters of Arts Degrees from the Naval War College and the University of Oklahoma.